



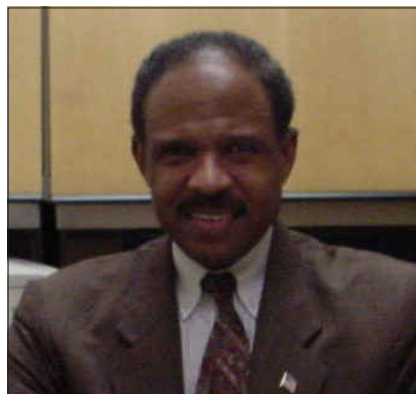
THE CONSULAR COMMUNIQUE

Clarence Hudson looks back

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Clarence Hudson has served as the Consul of the Non-Immigrant Visa section at the US Embassy since July 2003, and has seen significant change to the visa application process during his tenure. He brought a career of experience to lead the Non-Immigrant Visa operation in one of the United States' largest consular sections.



Mr. Clarence Hudson.

“Change has been the clarion call of my tenure in Bogotá. From the institution of biometric data collection and processing and the consequential requirement that all but

a few applicants personally appear for an interview to a US\$ 1.2 million renovation project to add six new interviewing windows and 10 application reception windows in the adjacent Embassy annex, change has been the dominant theme,” noted Mr. Hudson. “In the face of these legal, regulatory and procedural innovations, the hard work, professionalism and single-minded determination of NIV officers and staff members made incredible strides in improving the quality and responsiveness of visa services in Colombia. Three years-ago, the waiting period for NIV applicants for an interview stood at eighteen-months. Since that time, the waiting period for all but one sub-category has been eliminated. Applicants for students, petition-based employment visas, and visa revalidations can now usually request a visa appointment the **next day**. The Embassy has also worked hard to eliminate post-interviewing processing time. Our administrative staff has reduced this period to insure that the

completed passport is prepared for submission to our delivery service within one day of the interview (if there are no pending administrative or clearance issues). In short NO applicant fails to meet business obligations in the United States because of a lack of access.”

As many visa applicants have noticed, there were significant changes made to the visa application process after September 11th, 2001. The requirement of personal interviews for applicants brought some long-term visa holding applicants into the embassy for fingerprinting and a brief

interview. For some, it was the first time they had been to the embassy in decades. The intention of these new requirements is increased security of Americans and all others traveling to the United States, while continuing to provide more effective and responsive customer service. **“The consular officers at the American Embassy remain committed to facilitating the legitimate travel of Colombian citizens to the United States. We believe this to be in the best interest of both of our nations,” Mr. Hudson says.**

“We have also employed an integrated program of media interviews, speaking engagements and visits to demystify and explain visa policy and procedure. One of the most exciting aspects of these efforts has been our productive relationships with the Colombian Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Commerce, Industry and Tourism on business-related travel. A bi-national working group was established to help clarify the laws and procedures governing visa operations,” said Mr. Hudson.

American Citizens

All American citizens living in Colombia can contact the American Citizen Services Section at the following e-mail address:

ACS_Bogota@state.gov

Pardon Our Dust, We're Under Construction

Six New Interview Windows will allow Consular Officers to Better Serve Colombian Visa Applicants



Workers work busily on the new Annex, which will serve as the principal entrance for all visitors to the Consular Section.

The US Embassy's Consular Section is currently under construction. As applicants have noticed, the embassy compound is covered with machinery, temporary structures, and fences. Even with limited hours of operation, everyone who has an urgent need for an interview has been given an appointment.

“During the initial period, large jackhammers and other machinery were used in the demolition process, making it impossible to hear anything while the construction team was at work,” says a Vice-Consul. “This means that we had a small window of opportunity, during the workers’ lunch break, to fingerprint and interview all of the scheduled applicants. It was quite a challenge to remain open during this time, but we were committed to making sure that we were here to serve Colombians seeking visas.”

The renovation of the U.S. Embassy's Consular section will be complete approximately May 9, 2005. This renovation, and a related project on the American Citizens Services side, will improve customer service across the board.

“I hope that this allows us to see more visa applicants more quickly,” said one Vice-Consul.

Construction began on February 14th. The main waiting area and interview windows were unavailable during demolition, so temporary structures were built to allow individuals to apply for visas.

The renovation will provide several improvements to the consular section. Six new interview windows will be available to allow more consular officers to interview visa applicants. New restroom facilities have been added. In addition, the consular waiting area will be larger and will include an additional emergency exit.



Behind the green tarps are the six new customer service windows.



The “pavillion” is a temporary structure. It is being used during the construction period to complete the initial intake of visa applicants.

Match Made in Heaven?

Embassy Bogota looks closely at Fiancée Visas



A matchmaking agency known as “A Foreign Affair” held a social event for hopeful American men eager to meet Colombian women on January 14 in the coastal city of Cartagena. The event was meant to serve as a “get-to-know-you” social for the men and women who had solicited the services of the agency. An officer from the Immigrant Visa (IV) Unit happened to be vacationing at the same hotel that weekend and was able to observe the event. About 50 people mingled while agency representatives took photos of the American men and Colombian women together. A look at the agency's website (www.loveme.com) indicates that the agency specializes in matching up U.S. Citizen males with women from Colombia and 58 other countries, arranging tours and social functions and providing legal advice to facilitate the

immigration of foreign brides or fiancées to the U.S. Similar internet websites, such as www.ilovelatins.com focus exclusively on matching women from Cartagena, Barranquilla, and Panama, invariably depicted in bikinis, with “sincere gentlemen”. The latter website counsels customers on how to document their relationship, through preserving e-mails and other correspondence, and advises them to take photos together holding hands in order to “demonstrate serious intent” for immigration purposes.

Services such as these do not violate the law. Nonetheless, Embassy Bogotá's IV Unit regularly receives telephone calls and letters from petitioners in the United States who complain that their fiancées never met them at the airport, or arrived in the United States but have since left them. In most of the cases where the U.S. citizen petitioner feels “duped” by his foreign-born fiancée or spouse, the parties initially met through similar internet matching services. Despite the frequent complaints from dissatisfied customers, the market for internet matching services and agencies appears to be growing. Embassy Bogotá processed a record 1032 fiancée visa applications in 2004, up 21% from the previous year, with projections for dramatic further growth this year. The IV Unit has even received letters from Colombians informing them that the fiancée visa process is very easy to manipulate and the general public knows this. Bogotá's Deputy IV Chief has commented “People believe this is an easy way to get a visa to immigrate.” The IV Unit sees very few fiancée visa applications for male Colombians.

The IV Unit exercises increased vigilance with these cases, carefully questioning applicants to get the true story, and exchanging experiences with other U.S. Embassies in the region, many of whom have similar cases. One common story is that the applicant called a relative living in the United States and the relative passed the telephone to an American friend, and the couple began talking and shortly thereafter fell in love. In one recent case, when the IV officer decided to separate the petitioner and applicant -- who met through an internet service -- she found that they both gave very different answers to the same questions asked. The officer is now in the process of requesting that the Department of Homeland Security revoke the petition. In another case, the IV Unit made use of the services of the DHS Forensics Document Laboratory to chemically test a suspicious photograph of a supposed bride and groom. The lab tests indicated that the photo was a digital composite of two or more photos, and that the “couple” may in fact never have met.

Embassy Bogotá is committed to promptly processing the IV applications of legitimate applicants, including those who have made use of internet matching services. The daily challenge remains, however, in detecting fraud in a well-presented visa application.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I live in the United States and want some of my Colombian relatives to visit me. What can I do to help?

In accordance with U.S. immigration law, applicants must establish that they have strong ties to Colombia that will compel them to return after a temporary stay in the United States. Despite the assurances or good intentions of a U.S. relative, an invitation letter will simply help establish that the applicant has a credible reason for traveling, and will do little to help the applicant overcome the presumption of immigrant intent. If you wish, you may send your



relatives a personal letter explaining the purpose of the trip, the dates, and contact information. The applicant should bring the invitation letter with him/her to the visa interview. However, s/he must also bring documents that prove strong family and/or economic ties to Colombia. A letter of invitation from the U.S. is not sufficient to qualify for a visa, and even if you send a letter offering to pay for the trip, applicants who lack compelling economic or family ties, to a home abroad will be refused a visa. It is not necessary for relatives from the U.S. to come ahead of time to the interview, nor should they send documents to the Embassy, as it is impossible to match them with your application. The Visa Information Call Center programs all interview appointments. The number to call from the U.S. is (1-877) 804-5401.

What should I do if the I-94 form is still in my passport after I arrive in Colombia?

Remember to keep the I-94 form in your passport during your stay in the U.S.! It will be collected by the airlines when you depart the U.S. I-94s or I-94Ws not collected upon departure from the U.S. should be sent to the address listed below, with the supporting evidence and per instructions:

ACS-INS SBU
POB 7125
LONDON KY 40742-7125
USA

HOW TO CONTACT THE CONSULAR SECTION

For all consular information on visas, supporting documents, how to schedule an appointment, stolen/lost passports, etc., visit our web page: <http://bogota.usembassy.gov>.

Non-immigrant visas: Call the Visa Information Call Center by obtaining a PIN code at any Colpatria bank. Then call the Call Center at 01-8000-12-32-32. From the U.S., Dial 1-877-804-5401. There is a credit card access fee for U.S.-based numbers. From within Bogotá, dial 346-9150.

For **Immigrant Visas** information, call 571-315-1566 between 3 to 4 p.m., On Tuesdays. Priority dates for all immigrant visas are listed at http://travel.state.gov/visa_bulletin.html. The e-mail address is IVBogota@state.gov.

For the **Fraud Prevention Unit**, call 571-315-2497.

For **American Citizens Services**, e-mail questions to acs_bogota@state.gov.

Embassy Visa Services for Businesses

The Embassy makes every effort to assist Colombia-based companies to conduct business with companies in the United States. There are a wide variety of visas available to businessmen, depending on the purpose of travel. The most common type of business visa is a B1 visa. B1 visa recipients may travel to the U.S. to consult with business associates, negotiate a contract, buy goods or materials, settle an estate, appear as a witness in a court trial, participate in conferences, receive training, or undertake independent research.

E visas apply to investors who wish to invest or direct and develop the operations of an enterprise in which they have invested or are investing a substantial amount of capital. H visas are for individuals coming as nonimmigrants to the United States for temporary employment. L visas were created for multinational business with offices in many countries and a corps of specialized employees frequently assigned to tours of duty abroad. Only company managers and executives and employees with "specialized knowledge" qualify for an L visa. The Department of Homeland Security is responsible for determining whether the type of work offered and the applicant's experience meet statutory requirements for E, H, and L visas.

In order to help increase Colombian-American trade, the Embassy has maintained a variety of programs to facilitate legitimate business travel. Due largely to the Andean Trade Preferences Act, the commercial relationship between Colombia and the U.S. has prospered, as exports and imports have grown significantly. Both countries expect trade to further increase upon completion and approval of a Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador. Due to the prospects of expanded business links between Colombia and the U.S. and increased demand for business travel, the Embassy has labored to promote and expand current business programs, while creating new mechanisms to aid all legitimate business travelers.

1. The Business Visa Program: The Business Visa Program facilitates the issuance of visas to

employees of qualifying companies or corporations to do business in the United States. Companies that qualify for the Business Visa Program may receive early appointments for an interview for their employees.



2. Early Appointments for Groups: This program is designed to accommodate organizations that do not qualify for the program listed above. For example, if a group of cattle ranchers wants to attend a cattle fair in Texas, a representative organization could request early appointments for an interview for the ranchers. Requests for early appointments must be submitted at least sixty days in advance of the day of travel.

3. The Call Center and Emergency Business Travel: The Embassy Call Center allows the Consular Section to categorize visa appointments into 8 different categories. This service permits the Consular Section to provide priority treatment for business related travel. Also, the Embassy Call Center sets aside interviews each day for emergency situations. To qualify for emergency business travel, the applicant must have a letter from his employer stating the purpose and date of travel and a letter from the U.S. based sponsor that invites the applicant and states the purpose and date of travel.

The Embassy continues to work to provide timely visas for business travelers. The special business programs have assisted over 250 companies and thousands of employees in obtaining timely visas for legitimate business travel. Additionally, the Embassy has also reduced the visa appointment wait time for first time applicants from 18 to three months. We recognize the need to continue focusing on customer service and are therefore spending approximately US \$1.2 million to increase the physical consular space. We are also adding new adjudicating officers. This will result in faster service for Colombians seeking visa appointments and further reduce the wait time. Companies interested in more information about the Consular Section's business programs should visit the Embassy's website at (<http://bogota.usembassy.gov>).

COMMUNITY NEWS, EMBASSY SUPPORTS NEEDY CHILDREN

Colombia's children are the future of Colombia. In the slums of Bogotá, many children learn to survive in the harsh realities of day-to-day life. Fortunately for 374 lucky children, there is hope in the form of a school called the Colegio San Francisco de Asisi. This school is owned and operated by the Franciscan Order of Nuns from Rochester, Minnesota. The children who attend this school come from some of the poorest families in Bogotá. Average earnings for the families of these children is anywhere from \$0 - \$100 a month. Some of the parents are lucky to have 'jobs' like selling newspapers on street corners or working in flower fields, while others are desperate to find a job in the face of the high unemployment rate.



Every child at the party was given a toy and a new outfit, sponsored by their "madrino" or "padrino" at the Embassy.



The Embassy employees serve lunch to hundreds of children.

Approximately three years ago, members of the Bogotá Consular Section met Sr. Tierney, the nun who runs the Colegio. Since that time, consular employees both Americans and locally hired Colombians and their families have been regularly involved in supporting the activities of this school. Employees make quarterly trips to see the students, organizing a day of games, serving a full lunch, and, at Christmas, providing presents. We provide hot dogs and hamburgers, chips, drinks, and the classic favorite bobbing for apples. Embassy employees spend a few wonderful hours playing soccer, basketball, jump rope, and supervising an inflatable "jumpy castle". These events are extremely fun for both the children and the employees that attend.

These children have become particularly close to some employees, as there is a sponsorship program in which many participate. This is a "madrina/padrino" program where an employee pays \$25 a month for the education of one child. It is an extremely rewarding program as the employees get to know "their" child and see them on a regular basis. Sister Tierney provides report cards and the children occasionally write cards to their "madrina" or "padrino". There are many employees that take their sponsored child for outings to local movie theatres or restaurants.

For more information on sponsoring a child, please send an email to stierney@csfr.edu.co